ECA Update: October 28, 2016

IN THIS UPDATE:

Moniz: Eight Critical U.S. Nuclear Power Issues That Should Be Addressed Now

Power Magazine

October 26, 2016

UPCOMING EVENTS

October 2016

29

DOE-LM 10th Aniversary of Fernald Cleanup: "Weapons to Wetlands: A Decade of Difference" in Hamilton, OH

More info here

November 2016

9

Nuclear power's future—and its much-needed contribution to U.S. decarbonization efforts—may be hampered if eight pressing issues aren't addressed within the next five years, U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz said at a recent event held at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The issues Moniz outlined in his keynote speech at a six-hour event titled "Nuclear Energy at a Crossroads," at the think-tank's headquarters in Washington D.C. on October 24 include market concerns that have spurred the closure or announced retirement of several nuclear reactors, as well as the nation's spent fuel management program being in limbo. Moniz also provided critical reasons for why nuclear power should be a pillar of the nation's energy future, urging more public engagement, public funding, and public incentives to advance nuclear energy.

1. The fate of the existing U.S. nuclear fleet could have implications for carbon emissions. Over the last five years, low natural gas prices, market dynamics, technical issues, and policies that favor renewables have precipitated the closure or announced closure of 14 nuclear reactors. About half of the nation's 99 reactors (which includes the commercial start of Watts Bar 2 and the closure of Fort Calhoun) are in competitive wholesale electricity markets. New York's recently approved incentive program to help three nuclear plants remain economic over the next decade has been contested, Moniz noted, but it is an "innovative way" to preserve the plants that could be emulated by other states, like Illinois, he said. The closures also posed an "irony" in the context of the Clean Power Plan, Moniz

DOE-EM Site Specific Advisory Board Meeting in Las Vegas, NV

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November 2016

9

DOE-EM Site Specific Advisory Board Meeting in Oak Ridge, TN

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November 2016

16-18

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said, because they will occur—assuming the environmental rule moves forward—when states begin submitting their implementation plans over the next five years. “Having their options narrowed is not exactly the way to approach that,” he said.

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DOE Seeking Modification For WIPP In New Mexico

Nuclear Street

October 28, 2016

The Department of Energy has moved forward on a permit modification request for the Waste Isolation Pilot Program (WIPP) in Carlsbad, New Mexico, that outlines an above ground storage facility for transuranic waste that would be used for one year, while it works on returning the underground unit to service.

In a letter sent in September to the New Mexico Hazardous Waste Bureau of the state's Environment Department, the DOE outlines a project to create a Concrete Overpack Container Storage Unit that would be used to store an anticipated 65,280 cubic feet of transuranic waste from government facilities, such as the Los Alamos National Laboratory and the Idaho National Laboratory.

The facility has already received a backlog of waste shipments that would have been placed in underground storage. However, a radiation release forced closure of the underground facility in February 2014. Its return to partial service is expected by the end of the year, It will not be fully operational at that point, however, and a continuous backlog of waste is expected.

The Department of Energy along with Nuclear Waste Partnership, LLC, has requested the permit modification that would allow for above ground storage that

would include “transuranic mixed waste,” that would be stored “on the surface of the WIPP in a permitted hazardous waste container storage unit.”

The modified unit would include “remote-handled waste in shielded containers that is managed and stored as CH (contact handled) waste pursuant to ...” the existing permit.

The new unit would also allow for the WIPP to buy some time, if needed, when handling shipments. It would be used “during times when the facility is undergoing a planned oo unplanned maintenance activity,” the application says. It could also be used during “an event that delays waste emplacement,” including “inclement weather.”

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Progress, but no timeline, on IWTU operations

The Post Register

October 28, 2016

SUN VALLEY — A senior U.S. Department of Energy official on Thursday sounded hopeful about progress fixing the Integrated Waste Treatment Unit, but refused to offer a time frame for when it might be operational.

“I’m far more encouraged today than I was a year ago,” said Jack Zimmerman, DOE’s deputy manager of the Idaho Cleanup Project.

Zimmerman updated the Idaho National Laboratory Site Citizens Advisory Board on the treatment facility during its Sun Valley meeting. The first-of-its-kind plant was built to treat 900,000 gallons of liquid radioactive waste by 2012, but it has faced recurring technical issues and cost overruns.

DOE is racking up daily fines after missing a September state deadline to start the plant. But it still won’t be treating waste anytime soon: Zimmerman laid out a four-

phase approach that new cleanup contractor Fluor Idaho is taking to get the facility running, with the final phase being radioactive operations. Only phase one is complete.

Meanwhile, the IWTU continues to cause headaches for Idaho National Laboratory, which can't bring in a spent nuclear fuel shipment for an international research project until the plant is treating waste. Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden weighed in on the issue during a fiery presentation Thursday, explaining to the board why he's prevented the entry of spent nuclear fuel until IWTU is operational, and offering a blunt assessment of his interactions with DOE officials.

"Would somebody explain to me what the political upside is to the position I've taken?" Wasden said sarcastically. "I can't figure it out." IWTU progress

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International Diplomats Visit NNSA's Nevada National Security Site

NNSA

October 27, 2016

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration (DOE/NNSA) this week hosted diplomats from ten countries and

two international organizations at the Nevada National Security Site (NNSS) and at the National Atomic Testing Museum (NATM) in Las Vegas, Nevada.

The visit provided an up-close demonstration of NNSA's science-based Stockpile Stewardship Program (SSP), through which the U.S. is able to maintain the safety, security, and reliability of its nuclear weapons stockpile without nuclear explosive testing. The tour also showcased NNSA expertise in applying world-class science, technology, and engineering to various nuclear security missions, including technical support for Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) methodologies. NNSS—a former nuclear explosive test site until a moratorium on nuclear explosive testing was established in 1992—now serves as an experimental test bed and training ground for broad nonproliferation and national security missions beneficial to both the U.S. and the international community.

"We are pleased to be able to host international diplomats at NNSS to discuss the history of the U.S. nuclear program and demonstrate how our former nuclear explosive test site has been transformed into a national and international asset supporting a wide variety of nuclear nonproliferation and national security missions," said Anne Harrington, NNSA Deputy Administrator for Defense Nuclear Nonproliferation. "Through transparency visits like this week's visit—and by hosting training activities—we hope to build confidence within the international community in U.S. nonproliferation and arms control commitments."

"We hope the diplomats visiting Nevada will come away with a better appreciation for our commitment to CTBT goals and objectives through the world-class science and technology at our national laboratories and here at NNSS," said Brig. Gen. Michael Lutton, NNSA Principal Assistant Deputy Administrator for Military Application, who co-hosted the event.

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More water tests show odd chemical at DOE site

The Post Register

October 26, 2016

A hazardous chemical has turned up in more preliminary well water tests at the U.S. Department of Energy's desert site, federal officials said Wednesday.

But those officials said high concentrations of tetrachloroethylene in two wells doesn't mean the surrounding East Snake Plain Aquifer is contaminated with the clear chemical liquid. Known as PCE, it is often used for dry cleaning and as a metal degreaser.

The DOE, U.S. Geological Survey and cleanup contractor Fluor Idaho maintain the PCE is coming from inside the well shaft itself, which is sealed off from the surrounding aquifer with plastic piping.

DOE and Fluor said they plan to conduct further tests and put together a cleanup plan in the coming months. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality are monitoring the effort.

The shafts of the Westbay-brand wells, nearly a quarter-mile deep, were filled with an outside water source when they were installed years ago, and that water has remained separate from the surrounding aquifer, officials said.

"At this point we're pretty comfortable this isn't a big (aquifer) contamination problem — it's the well itself," said Nolan Jensen, DOE environmental restoration manager. "Based on the way the well is constructed, there is essentially no risk of what we found in the well getting out of the well and into the aquifer. So we're pretty comfortable this is a confined situation."

Officials grew concerned when traces of PCE first showed up in routine tests of Well No. 2051 late last year. Dozens of similar monitoring wells are positioned around the DOE site, ensuring nuclear cleanup and research activities aren't polluting the region's most abundant water source. Officials were stumped on how this unusual chemical may have reached the aquifer, and why it had only been

detected in a single well. Later tests showed 824 micrograms of PCE per liter of water in the well, located not far from the Big Lost River Rest Area. The federal safe water drinking standard is 5 micrograms.

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Zion decommissioning ahead of schedule

World Nuclear News

October 28, 2016

EnergySolutions subsidiary ZionSolutions has successfully completed the sixth year of decommissioning work at the Zion nuclear power station with record setting performance, the company has announced. The project is on budget and ahead of schedule.

Zion's two pressurized water reactors (PWRs) on the shores of Lake Michigan were permanently shut down in 1998 for economic reasons after just over 20 years of operation. In 2007, owner Exelon contracted EnergySolutions to dismantle the plant, ship the waste to its disposal site in Utah, and return the Illinois site to greenfield status over a ten-year schedule.

The work begin in 2010 after the plant's licence and decommissioning funds were transferred to EnergySolutions. The site will be returned to Exelon about 2020. Used fuel will remain on the site in dry cask storage at an independent used fuel storage installation, known as an ISFSI, until a federal repository is available to receive the fuel.

EnergySolutions said on 25 October the decommissioning effort is currently 88% complete and several years ahead of the original ten-year schedule. The

accelerated decommissioning schedule will directly translate into a lower overall decommissioning cost, the company said.

Achievements claimed by the project to date include the design and construction of the most modern and largest ISFSI for decontamination and decommissioning (D&D); a world record for the transfer of used fuel to the ISFSI of 366 days; an "industry first" in the successful segmentation, removal, transportation and disposal of both reactor vessels; and completion of the D&D industry's largest and most efficient major component removal and disposal project. Furthermore, projections indicate nearly a three-fold reduction in overall worker exposure compared to the previous industry best performance, the company said.

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